

Stray Cat in New Castle Tests Positive for Rabies

DOVER (Sept. 15, 2021) – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is advising residents who live or spend time in the vicinity between West Ninth Street and West Third Street near Battery Park in New Castle of a positive case of rabies in a stray cat that came into contact with four individuals and a dog recently. The cat was tested for rabies, which returned positive results on Sept. 9, 2021. The individuals who came in contact with the cat have all begun treatment for rabies exposure.

Anyone who thinks they may have been bitten, scratched, or come in contact with a stray cat in this area should immediately contact their health care provider or call the DPH Rabies Program at 302-744-4995. An epidemiologist is available 24/7. Anyone in the area who thinks a stray cat might have bitten their pet should call their private veterinarian for examination, treatment, and to report the exposure to the Delaware Department of Agriculture.

Rabies is a preventable disease. DPH recommends that individuals take the following steps to prevent rabies exposure:

- All dogs, cats, and ferrets 6 months of age and older are required by Delaware law to be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian.
- Pet owners can reduce the possibility of pets being exposed to rabies by keeping them indoors and not letting them roam free. It is especially important for pet owners who do allow their cats to roam outdoors to vaccinate their pets.
- Do not touch or otherwise handle wild or unfamiliar animals, including cats and dogs, even if they appear

friendly.

- Do not keep your pet's food or water outdoors; bowls can attract wild and stray animals.
- Do not feed feral animals, including cats, as the risk of rabies in wildlife is significant.
- Spaying or neutering your pet may reduce the tendency to roam or fight and, thus, reduce the chance they will be exposed to rabies.
- Keep your garbage securely covered.
- Consider vaccinating livestock and horses, as well. It is recommended to consult with your private veterinarian if you have any questions regarding whether your animal(s) should be vaccinated against rabies.

Since Jan. 1, 2021, the Division of Public Health has performed rabies tests on 150 animals, 13 of which were confirmed to be rabid, which includes one dog, one raccoon, one skunk, one deer, one fox, three cats (including this one), and five bats. DPH only announces those rabies cases for which it is possible the animal had unknown contacts with additional humans or pets.

In 2020, DPH performed rabies tests on 121 animals, four of which were confirmed to be rabid, including one raccoon, one bat, and two cats.

Rabies is an infectious disease affecting the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Infection can occur through the bite or scratch of an infected animal or if saliva from such an animal gets into the eyes, nose, mouth, or an opening in the skin. Rabies in humans and animals cannot be cured once symptoms appear. Therefore, if a human has been exposed, and the animal is unavailable to be quarantined or tested, DPH recommends that people receive post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment, a series of four vaccinations, as a precautionary measure.

If You Encounter an Animal Behaving Aggressively:

- If you encounter a wild animal behaving aggressively, it is recommended you contact the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's (DNREC) Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912 or 302-735-3600. Staff will determine whether it is more appropriate to refer callers to a private nuisance wildlife control operator. A listing of nuisance wildlife control operators can be found at <https://wildlifehelp.org>. Calls after hours and on weekends can be made to the 24-hour dispatch number at 800-523-3336.
- Do not throw items at the animal or make loud banging noises, which may startle the animal and cause it to attack. Instead, your initial response – if the animal is behaving in an aggressive manner or appears to be foaming at the mouth – should be to raise your hands above your head to make yourself appear larger to the animal while slowly backing away from it. If the animal starts coming toward you, raise your voice and yell sternly at it, "Get away!" If all that fails, use any means to protect yourself including throwing an object at the animal or trying to keep it away by using a long stick, shovel, or fishing pole.
- If you encounter a stray or feral domestic animal, such as a cat or dog, behaving aggressively, contact the Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

If You Encounter a Sick or Injured Animal:

- To report a sick or hurt wild animal, Delaware residents are asked to contact the DNREC's Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912 or 302-735-3600. Staff will determine whether it is more appropriate to refer callers to a permitted volunteer wildlife rehabilitator.
- If you encounter a sick stray domestic animal, such as a cat or dog, contact the Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

For more information on the DPH rabies program,

visit www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/rabies.html or call 1-866-972-9705 or 302-744-4995. For more information on rabies, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/rabies.